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SAFEGUARDING YOUR FOOD AND DRUG SUPPLIES -- No. 32

December 8, 1930

A radio talk by W. R. M. Wharton, Chief of the Eastern District, Federal Food and Drug Administration, delivered Monday mornings at 10 a.m. Eastern Standard Time, through station WJZ, New York, and associated National Broadcasting Company stations.

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Good morning, my radio friends, your Government representative is with you once again to tell you how your foods and drugs are safeguarded through the enforcement of the Federal Food and Drugs Act, and to tell you how to read food and drug labels in order that you may become discriminating, careful, exacting, and economical buyers.

My story today concerns the trial in a Federal court of an olive oil adulterator. Olive oil is considered by epicures to be the most desirable of all table oils and it sells for a much higher price than any other oil used for table purposes. The illegitimate gain to be derived from the sale of olive oil adulterated with other and cheaper oils is such as to have caused many adventurers to attempt to sell adulterated olive oil. Your food and drug inspectors are constantly on the alert to detect those individuals who attempt to sell as olive oil, products which are not olive oil. An investigation in one of our large cities recently developed that a certain individual was putting out a product labeled "Pure Olive Oil", which was adulterated, very largely adulterated with cottonseed oil. Moreover, the packages being shipped by this individual contained very much less than was declared on the labels. Interstate shipments of this individual's products were sampled and the samples were examined in one of the many chemical laboratories maintained by the Food and Drug Administration for the effective enforcement of the food and drugs act. The government's expert chemists found that the products in these shipments consisted mainly of cottonseed oil, instead of olive oil as declared on the label. The chemists also found the quantity in the cans to be materially short of the volume declared.

Well, in the course of time, the individual responsible for this fraud was brought into a Federal court and charged with violating the Federal food and drugs act. His defense was very interesting. He contended that he had not made the shipments in question and that there must be some mistake in identity since he had not sold the particular oil which was found to have been adulterated. Your government representatives were ready for just this sort of a plea for they had made a complete investigation of the case, and what do you suppose they found out? They found that after these samples had been collected by the Government inspector from the dealer to whom the fake olive oil had been shipped, the shipper had learned



of the collection of these samples and he had gone secretly to the dealer, and had asked this dealer to testify falsely that the goods had been bought from an unknown peddler and not from the defendant. When the defendant testified that he had not made the shipments, your Government representatives informed the judge of the effort of the defendant to secure false testimony. The defendant was convicted of violation of the food and drugs act. The judge imposed a fine of \$400 and lectured him severely. Now the sequel to this case is very interesting. The olive oil adulterator did not have money enough with him to pay his fine. He was held in custody while his wife went out to secure the necessary funds. Finally, the sum of \$400 was secured and paid to the clerk of the court in \$50 bills. The clerk of the court examined the money and what do you suppose he found. He found one of the \$50 bills was counterfeit money. It may be said, however, that investigation of this particular feature showed that the counterfeit bill had apparently come into the hands of this individual innocently. Well, the fine was eventually paid in good money. It is, my friends, by actions such as this that your food and drug supply is being constantly safeguarded under the Federal food and drugs act.

This story leads up to my read-the-label subject for today. I propose to tell you how to read labels on edible oils.

The principal oils which are sold on the American market for edible use are: Olive oil, cottonseed oil, corn or maize oil, peanut oil, sesame, rapeseed, and soybean oil. Olive oil is always sold under its own name. Cottonseed oil is frequently sold under its own name but is likewise often sold under the name "salad oil". Corn oil is sold under its own name, under fanciful names, and sometimes under the name "salad oil". Peanut oil, rapeseed oil, soybean oil and sesame oil are practically never sold at retail under their own names, but are practically always called "salad oil". The term "salad oil" likewise may apply to a mixture of any two or more of these oils.

In order to give you an idea of the relative commercial value of these oils, I may say that the wholesale quotation at the present time for these oils is approximately as follows per gallon. Olive oil \$2.00, soybean oil, 80 cents, Peanut oil, 90 cents, Corn oil, Sesame oil, Rapeseed oil, 75 cents, and cottonseed oil, 60 cents. In general, then, my friends, you should be able to buy any of the oils named as such or as "salad oil" at less than half the price you will pay for good olive oil.

Olive oil is a fruit oil, since the olive is a fruit. It is produced in the various countries located in the Mediterranean Basin, including France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Africa, and Turkey. It is also produced in California. In general, olive oil produced in the uplands away from the sea is of light color, with bland, sweet and fruity taste; whereas olive oil produced in the low lands of the Mediterranean shores has a deep yellow color, a pronounced heavy characteristic taste with a tendency to





a sharp bitterlike flavor. Since the several countries of production around the Mediterranean sea produce both the bland and heavily flavored olive oils, since the heavy oils are often refined and blended for American shipment, and since there is some exchange of oils between the several producing countries, it is difficult to associate with any particular country of origin any definite qualities of color, odor, and taste.

Therefore, the terms "French", "Italian" or "Spanish" on olive oil labels do not necessarily indicate relative quality characteristics. Moreover, it is practically impossible for any one to determine with certainty, by examination, the country of origin of any particular lot of olive oil.

In general, in the American trade, the French Olive Oils, which usually sell for the highest price, run from yellow to very light yellow in color and have a pleasing, bland, fruity and mildly olive-like taste.

The Italian Olive Oils vary from rather light straw color in the finer grades to oils with a distinct greenish tint in the lower grades. They vary from pleasingly bland and mild in taste to strong, the strong having a pronounced characteristic olive flavor with acrid characteristics, in some cases: or a sharp flavor, such a flavor<sup>as</sup> leaves a slight burning sensation on the palate caused by acidity.

The Spanish Olive Oils of the hill country are light colored bland oils of high quality and the American trade in the United States for the most part receive oils of this character when buying Spanish Olive Oil. Spain is the largest producing country of olive oil and large quantities of oils called "corriente" or ordinary quality oils are produced there. Such oils when imported into the United States are generally consumed by those who prefer the less expensive heavily flavored types of olive oils or else they are used for blending purposes.

The Grecian Olive Oils in general are the darkest in color and the strongest in flavor, and the Tunisian, Algerian or African Oils are mostly similar to the Spanish. California Olive Oil is usually light yellow, although sometimes it has a greenish tint, is bland, sweet and nutty in flavor.

Olive oils, are often blended so as to produce a uniform product when sold by brand name, therefore try different brands until you find the one which suits you best. The difficulty with this procedure from the consumers' standpoint is that olive oils which are sold by brand name, and especially those that are extensively advertised, sometimes are sold at higher prices than other brands equally as good or better in quality. I have just reviewed a large dealer's price list and I find retail prices of olive oil ranging from \$3.35 to \$7.00 per gallon in gallon cans with many intermediate prices for different brands. According to my notion, several of the brands offered at around \$4.50 per gallon represent equally as good oil as the brand for which \$7.00 per gallon is asked. My advice to the label readers, then, is to look for a brand





of olive oil until you find one which suits your taste and which is not sold at the very top prices, for if you will take the trouble you will probably find what you want at comparatively reasonable prices. Whenever you buy olive oil be very certain always to read the label to assure yourself that the package is labeled, "olive oil" and that there are no qualifying phrases on the label which show the product to be something else, or olive oil mixed with some other oil. A product labeled Olive oil may be relied upon to be pure olive oil. This is the most important advice that I can give the label readers, since a great many ingenious methods have been tried to create the impression that oil, not olive oil, is olive oil. Of some of these I will speak later.

The terms "Virgin" or "Verge" or "Extra Virgin" are often employed on olive oil labels. These terms were originally employed to differentiate first pressings from other pressings of olive oil. They were also used in connection with first quality products, but the words have been over-worked and possibly now have no particular significance with respect to quality.

The same may be said with respect to the terms "Supreme", and "Super-fine" and other superlatives, whether expressed in English or other languages. These terms occur on olive oil labels but they do not mean very much. They have lost whatever original significance they had due to indiscriminate use.

The label reader will encounter some labels on olive oil which declare the product to be medicinal olive oil; or the term "U. S. P." will be used on the label. The letters "U.S.P.", are the initial letters of "U. S. Pharmacopocia." When so labeled olive oil must conform to the requirements and tests laid down in the Pharmacopocia. Practically all pure olive oil meets these tests so that these terms do not give you any additional assurances of purity over the assurance conveyed by the words olive oil themselves.

Cottonseed oil, a refined oil from cotton seed, is a light yellow bland oil with no particular characteristic flavor. Corn oil, a refined oil obtained from the germ of corn, is usually lighter in color than cottonseed oil, is bland, has a slight odor and flavor of corn. Sesame oil, a refined oil obtained from sesame seed, is of rather a dark yellow color, it is bland and without pronounced flavor, and has a tendency to become rancid and develop a rancid flavor. Rapeseed and mustard seed oil are of various shades of yellow. If well refined, they are bland, but if not properly refined, they have strong characteristic flavors. Peanut oil, a refined oil from peanuts, is quite light in color, is bland and has a flavor which suggests peanuts. Soybean oil, refined oil from soybeans, is light in color, is bland and without any particular characteristic flavor. These are all vegetable oils.

When you buy salad oil there will be delivered to you a product labeled, "Salad Oil", "Table oil", or "Vegetable Oil", and these will uniformly be composed either of cottonseed oil, or corn oil, or some one of the vegetable oils I have named, or a mixture of these. Some times the label will declare the kind of oil contained, as for example, "Salad Oil,



composed of pure cottonseed oil". On the other hand, other labels will declare the product to be "Salad Oil, composed of vegetable oils". You may be sure that any product labeled as salad oil, or table oil, or vegetable oil, is not olive oil.

The salad oils or table oils or vegetable oils are desirable products of good quality and they serve useful purposes in the diet. Indeed, these oils are preferred by some who do not especially relish the taste of olive oil, and such oils sell for a price less than half that asked for olive oil.

It is essential that you read labels on this class of product because, as I have already said, many labels are designed with the intention of misleading you. A label may have a picture of an olive tree with figures dressed in the garb of Italian peasants gathering the fruit.

This is perfectly legitimate upon a can of olive oil, but when depicted upon a can which is inconspicuously labeled cottonseed oil or salad oil, the design is apt to be misleading unless the purchaser carefully reads all of the label. In some cases, the olive tree design has given way to a tree of nondescript character. Nevertheless, the buyer often mistakes such a pictorial design to represent an olive oil product, when as a matter of fact, the cans will be found to be labeled, salad oil, cottonseed oil, or corn oil, if you read the labels carefully. Similarly, the use of Italian, or Spanish flags or a prominent display of the Italian national colors, red, white, and green, or a coat of arms, or a regal crown, or foreign coins and medals, or a picture of an Italian army officer, or a view of the Bay of Naples and dozens of similar devices may be used to convey the impression that the product consists of imported olive oil. Furthermore, the use of brand names suggesting Italy, France, or Spain, or some city or locality in these countries such as, Termini Imerese brand or Lucca brand, are sometimes found on salad oil labels. These and foreign language statements on salad oil labels are generally intended to convey the impression that the product is imported olive oil. Of course, if these designs and devices are employed on a can of olive oil produced where claimed, they are perfectly legitimate. However, if used on salad oil, they are misleading. It is for this reason that you must read labels carefully and not be guided by first impressions which labels give you. Sometimes you will find the expression "salad oil, flavored with pure olive oil" - on a label, and often the arrangement and size of lettering will cause the words, "Olive oil" to stand out most prominently. In general, such a product is no better than any other salad oil.

Table oils are often put up in packages short of the volume required for a gallon, a quart, and a pint, and frequently you find such short volume packages labeled .97 of a gallon, or .97 of a quart. If you read labels, you will not think that you are getting a full quantity when you buy such packages.



You will encounter cottonseed oils labeled with the term, "Winter Pressed". This term means that the oil, after pressing from the seed, has been allowed to settle at a temperature low enough to separate out and remove a large percentage of the stearin in the oil after which the oil will remain clear after bottling or packaging when exposed to winter temperatures. Without such treatment the oil, would, on becoming cold, turn cloudy, or even assume a semi-solid appearance, because of a flocculent precipitate of stearin which appears on chilling.

The American people seem to use less quantities of the edible oils than other peoples of the world. It has been said that the per capita consumption of olive oil in the United States is only 8 ounces per year. All of the table oils are nutritious and valuable foods, and they might advantageously be more extensively used.

Now, my friends, let me urge you to read labels, to read labels intelligently and to be sure that you are given the product you wish to buy. Who makes the choice of the product which comes to your table? You spend the money for the family and you have a right to make that choice yourself. Do you yield to the importunities or the convenience of the trades people with whom you deal, or do you make intelligent selections for yourself? You are a thinking individual and I am urging you, Mr. and Mrs. Housewife, with all the seriousness that I can command, that it is to your advantage to employ the keenest discrimination in making your purchases and to bring to bear the fullest information that you can get if you are to become discriminating, careful, and economical buyers, and if you are to get exactly what you want and what you are entitled to. You may easily become discriminating buyers if you will study my read-the-label broadcasts. I have talked on scores of products already and copies of all of my talks are yours for the asking.

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